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## Ohio, Oregon also looking to pool educators' health insurance

**LANSING** – Senate Republicans, who have a feasibility study underway that could provide options for lowering the cost of educators' health care, aren't the only ones concerned about getting more dollars to the classrooms.

The Ohio House of Representatives just passed a bill similar to legislation introduced in the Michigan Senate that would create a statewide pool for school employee healthcare benefits. Ohio projects short-term cost savings of \$187 million and long-term savings of \$222 million annually.

In addition, Democratic Gov. Ted Kulongoski has introduced a similar proposal in Oregon. That state expects to see a 5- to 15-percent cost savings for their school districts.

"The move is underway across the country to spend less on the cost of education and more on educating children," said Sen. Shirley Johnson, R-Troy, chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "As with Ohio and Oregon, any money saved in Michigan on administrative costs would mean more money in our classrooms, which is where it belongs."

Johnson proposed the feasibility study and introduced Senate Bills 55 and 56 following numerous requests from superintendents criticizing rising health care costs and voicing their opinions on ways to save essential school programs.

The Michigan study, to be completed by July, will determine the practicality and economic advantages of moving all educators to a statewide health insurance pool. This includes public schools, community colleges, state universities and intermediate school districts. The Senate also is considering several other options to maintain quality health insurance benefits for educators while saving money for school districts.

"Senator Johnson's bills and the feasibility study are excellent tools to help us push the discussion forward on this growing financial problem in the public school system," said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. "Reports indicate that even if we increased funding by \$225 per pupil, not one cent would make it to the classrooms.

"It's unacceptable to continue letting health insurance and pension costs eat away at school resources. We must address this issue now in a way that treats educators fairly and yet increases the funding available for educating Michigan's children."

According to a national study by the Association of School Business Officials International, schools have had to trim spending on building maintenance, teaching positions and technology upgrades to counterbalance the rising cost of health care.